



Mogadishu, 1993

Colonialism

Here we are, at the end of Capital, Volume 1, the famous and huge book that so many people talk about and so few people read. We have read it. We are more fit to be cadres. We are more fit to be the vanguard. What remain are only the three last chapters (**attached**), which are not difficult to read, although as always they challenge us to be brave and to act, and action will never be easy.

In **Chapter 31** Marx states that the origin of the industrial (not farming) capitalist is in colonialism.

“The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalised the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief

momenta of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theatre."

"To-day industrial supremacy implies commercial supremacy. In the period of manufacture properly so called, it is, on the other hand, the commercial supremacy that gives industrial predominance. Hence the preponderant rôle that the colonial system plays at that time. It was "the strange God" who perched himself on the altar cheek by jowl with the old Gods of Europe, and one fine day with a shove and a kick chucked them all of a heap. It proclaimed surplus-value making as the sole end and aim of humanity."

This last describes in a single sentence, the state of affairs that Marx's book was written to expose; and Marx did succeed in exposing "capital" as "surplus-value making".

Yet it appears that Marx did not deal with Primitive Accumulation in the sense that the phrase would nowadays be understood. Marx does not establish that capitalism required a ready pile of money or its equivalent. What he establishes is how the requisite class forces were brought into being, in Western Europe, in the revolutions that overthrew feudalism.

It is a mistake to think that a capitalist business requires "capital" in advance, if by "capital" is meant money in the bank, or land, buildings, equipment et cetera. It does require such things, but they do not make it a capitalist business as opposed to any other kind of project. What makes a business

work as capitalism is a dual relationship. The first part of it is the relationship between the worker and the capitalist. The second part is the relationship of the capitalist with his market. If these two relationships do not both exist, or are faulty, then a capitalist business will not survive. But if they do exist, then the other means, including money, will probably be found without too much difficulty.

Marx shows clearly how the proletariat arose historically in Europe in the 16th century. He shows how the bourgeois class arrives on the scene. He shows how all the social building blocks including proletariat and market, are assembled, but not the money. In any case, capital is not money, it is a relation. Marx says so, directly, in Chapter 33. So the accumulation necessary for capitalism is not treasure, but is an accumulation of relationships; this is what we learn from the chapters in “Capital” on Primitive Accumulation.

Marx does not, in Capital, make a strong distinction between slavery and capitalism. He describes slavery candidly and without flinching from the horror of it. But he never discusses slavery in a comparative way, as distinct from surplus-value-extracting bourgeois-and-proletarian capitalism. Yet (bourgeois) slavery also started in the 16th century, or slightly before, and it ran on as an intercontinental Atlantic system for the next three hundred years, in parallel with the early development of capitalism proper, until Marx’s time, such that the last end of bourgeois slavery was the cataclysm of the American Civil War, that was happening while Marx was writing Capital.

Chapter 32 of Capital, Volume 1 contains about 1000 words in only four paragraphs. It is a full historical sweep from the past of slaves and serfs through present capitalism to the future, when the expropriators will be expropriated. It resembles the Communist Manifesto.

Chapter 33 is very interesting, but in spite of its title, it is not really about colonialism. Instead, Marx uses the example of part of one colony of the time, Australia, to make points about capitalism and to “discover in the Colonies the truth as to the conditions of capitalist production in the mother country”. Also note the very last paragraph of the chapter (and the book), which says:

“We are not concerned here with the conditions of the colonies. The only thing that interests us is the secret discovered in the new world by the Political Economy of the old world, and proclaimed on the housetops: that the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, and therefore capitalist private property, have for their fundamental condition the annihilation of self-earned private property; in other words, the expropriation of the laborer.”

“...capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons, established by the instrumentality of things,” says Marx.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Capital V1, C31, 32, 33, Capitalist, Accumulation, Colonialism](#).
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